



# Committee On Finance

**Max Baucus, Ranking Member**

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **Statement of U.S. Senator Max Baucus Medicare: Looking Toward Final Passage**

The hour of final passage of landmark Medicare prescription drug legislation is near. Late yesterday, we reached an agreement on the distribution of the remaining \$12 billion of available funding. With this agreement, the Senate got the wind back in its sails, which will hopefully allow for smooth sailing toward final passage.

Yesterday's agreement to split the \$12 billion down the middle and provide \$6 billion to traditional Medicare demonstrations and \$6 billion to PPO demonstrations mirrors the balance and symmetry in the underlying bill.

I'd like to thank Chairman Grassley, and my colleagues on both sides, for working together and being open to compromise over the last few weeks of negotiations. We're working in virtually a 50-50 Senate, which means that the needs of both sides have to be considered equally.

But throughout all of our negotiations, it's vital that we never forget who we're doing this for -- our nation's seniors. Folks who have spent their lives working hard, raising their families, paying their taxes. It's important that they have a solid Medicare program, with prescription drug coverage, that they can rely on. It's important that we get Medicare reform right and I believe that by continuing to work together we will.

And for seniors in my state, I've worked hard to make sure Medicare reform works in rural America. Chairman Grassley shares this goal. The Medicare legislation that the Senate will soon pass will not force seniors into private plans that don't work for them. In my state of Montana, there are many regions where private plans just don't exist. These rural seniors must have access to a government fallback for their Medicare health insurance and prescription drug coverage. This bill makes sure that they will.

I'm also proud of the work we've done to help low income seniors have access to high quality medical care and drug coverage. We've included common sense protections that won't let lower income folks fall through the cracks.

I believe we'll look back on June 26, 2003 as an important day in the history of American health care. This isn't a perfect bill and doesn't contain everything I would have liked it to. But it sets up an important framework. A framework that will allow our seniors to afford the prescription drugs they need to maintain a high quality of life. In the coming years, as more funds become available, I look forward to building upon this legislation and filling in some of the gaps.

As is often said, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." The passage of the Senate's Medicare prescription drug legislation begins us on the journey toward effective, comprehensive Medicare reform. Our seniors will soon have access to the health care and prescription drug coverage they deserve.

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